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# Mr. Truman's Memoirs: German Surrender

INSTALLMENT 10 OF EXCERPTS FROM VOL. I, 'YEAR OF DECISIONS'

By Harry S. Truman

GERMAN resistance had begun to crumble on all fronts by the middle of April [1945]. Until almost the end, however, there was talk of a last-ditch stand by the top Nazis and the German Command. It was believed that this stand would revolve about the so-called Redoubt, in the mountain areas of Bavaria, Austria and North Italy. To this region it was expected the Nazi leaders would withdraw with what was left of the S. S. and other trusted troops, and there they would stage a long, drawn-out resistance. Allied operations for the final phase of the war made provision to head this off. It was rumored that Hitler had left Berlin on April 20 for the Redoubt, but when the American Third and Seventh Armies moved deep into this area, they found the Germans had not been able to build this final fortress. During the last days of April came the linking up of the American and Russian Armies, the surrender of the German forces in Italy, and finally the total collapse of German resistance. As our military plans continued to develop with unrivaled speed, frightened Nazi leaders began seeking deals with the Western Allies. The thought of falling into Russian hands drove them into a panic. As the lesser of two evils, they turned to us. One of these attempts at a separate deal had already made some trouble for us with the Russians. In March, General Karl Witz, the chief S. S. officer of the German forces in Italy, had started parleys with American O. S. S. agents in Switzerland with a view toward the possible surrender of the German Army in Italy. Nothing ever came of these parleys except to make the Russians highly suspicious of our motives. Molotov wrote to Ambassador Hurley in Moscow demanding that the negotiations with the Germans be broken off. President Roosevelt cabled Stalin that the Russians were misinformed. His explanation was that no reason why we should not listen to offers by the enemy to surrender to Allied commanders in the field, and that he could not agree to suspend efforts to capture them because Molotov objected. This did not satisfy Stalin, who answered that the Germans had tricked the Allies, and had profited by moving their divisions from the Italian front to the Russian front. Actually, those three divisions went to the Western Front, against us. It was not a good situation, any one could see. Stalin at this time would have interfered with our advances in Germany.

The Russians were always suspicious of everything and everybody, and Wolff's approach to the Allies made them suspect that we were trying to get the German forces in the West to surrender to us while they still continued to fight on the Russian front. The Russians also appeared to be afraid that we would occupy all Germany and leave them on the other side of the Polish border.

At the time this incident occurred the Germans still had a powerful fighting force in Italy, made up of twenty-five German divisions and five Italian Fascist divisions. They were holding strong positions south of the Po, on a line from the Adriatic near Lake Comacchio, and a surrender at that moment would have been important to us.

THE purpose of listening to any German offers by our military command in Italy was not to negotiate but to facilitate an unconditional surrender. But the Germans were hesitant about accepting the terms of surrender upon which we insisted. At Churchill's urging, in order to avoid further friction with the Russians, the Allied Commander in Italy, Field Marshal Alexander, was instructed to drop the talks. And the O. S. S. in Rome was instructed by our chiefs of staff to cease contact with the Germans. We then informed the Russians of our action.

It was not long after this that the Allied forces in Italy jumped off on their final offensive. On April 21 they captured the City of Bologna. On the 23d, American units crossed the Po. Soon thereafter the Germans ceased to be effective forces. Alexander asked for permission to communicate with German officers who would have authority to surrender. This time arrangements were made for the Russians to have a representative on hand. The deal came quickly.

On April 28 the terms of surrender were handed to the Germans at Allied Headquarters in Italy. These terms were agreed to that same day and signed on the 29th. General Klenz and another Russian officer were present. The terms of surrender called for hostilities to cease at noon on May 2. The surrender was to include the Italian Fascist divisions that were part of the German command. By this time Mussolini's puppet Italian Salustian Republic had ceased to exist. Mussolini himself was assassinated in late April by the Partisans.

The war in Italy was over, and I sent a message of congratulation to Field Marshal Alexander, and to the ranking American commander in that theatre, General Mark W. Clark. I used the occasion of the surrender in Italy to warn the Germans and the Japanese that only unconditional surrender could save them from destruction.

There was no Russian Army in Italy. The German surrender there was consequently made to the Western Allies. Outside Italy the situation was different. On all the main fronts the Germans were attempting to make separate surrenders to the Western Allies. There were obvious implications and complications here, for the Nazi leaders and some of their generals were playing a devious game.

It was clear to us that they were trying to create trouble between the Western Allies and Russia, in a last desperate effort to save their necks and salvage as much of their regime as possible. A good indication of this was the Himmler affair.\*

I gave little weight, however, to all these last-minute maneuvers by the Nazi leaders. We knew that there was no longer any constituted authority in Germany, and that no Nazi leader could speak for the German people or for their armies. Any enemy forces who wanted to surrender could do so, as a tactical matter, to the Allied commanders in the field. Except for local commanders, there was no question of



VICTORY: President Truman, on his sixty-first birthday, officially announced the surrender of Germany. Listening to him give the news to the press are, seated along wall from left: Elmer Davis, Office of War Information chief; Secretary of Commerce Henry A. Wallace; Maj. Gen. Philip B. Fleming; Representative Joseph W. Martin Jr.; Gen. George C. Marshall; J. Leonard Reloch; Secretary of the Treasury John W. Snyder; Mrs. Truman and Margaret Truman. Seated next to President is Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War.

these last days of anything less than unconditional surrender simultaneously to all three major Allies, and military operations continued toward that goal.

On May 1 the German radio announced the death of Hitler. This man, who had brought such infinite misery to the world, had died in the ruins of his Chancellery. The reports I received said he was a suicide. I had expected that many high German officers would take this way out in case of defeat but I knew that Hitler had never lived by the code of the Prussian officer, and I thought that in his fanaticism he would resist to the very end.

Hitler's monstrous assault on civilization cost the lives of 15,000,000 people, and he and his regime left countless others maimed in body and soul. But now, at last, the stranglehold this demon of a man had held on the German people had been broken. Throughout the world men could now be certain that his death had brought us closer to the end of fighting and nearer to the return of peace.

When the German surrender came, it was through the military commanders not through the politically defunct Nazi leaders. And now there was no issue over the terms of unconditional surrender. Germany was in ruins and its armies beaten. Its military leaders knew it and also knew we knew it. But still they preferred to come to the Western Allies for surrender. On May 2 General Eisenhower reported that General Blumentritt, commanding an army group in northwest Germany, had indicated that he wished to surrender his forces to the British Army. Eisenhower explained that the surrender must be unconditional and added, "I am treating it as a tactical matter and will inform Russian General Susluparov accordingly."

The next day, May 3, Eisenhower reported that Blumentritt had not appeared. On May 4, Field Marshal Montgomery's headquarters, and the German High Command now had other intentions. Instead of Blumentritt, Admiral Friedeburg and other high officers had arrived, carrying authority from Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of the German High Command. They asked Montgomery to accept the surrender of the Twelfth and Twenty-first German Armies then facing the Russians, and to permit German refugees to pass through the Allied lines to Schleswig-Holstein. These requests were turned down. The Germans were instructed to inform Keitel that only unconditional surrender could be accepted. Eisenhower said that he had instructed Montgomery that the surrender of Denmark, Holland, the Frisian Islands, Heligoland and Schleswig-Holstein could be regarded by Montgomery as a tactical matter, and the deal closed on the spot.

"If, however," Eisenhower's instructions continued, "any larger offer such as to surrender Norway and forces on other fronts is proposed, the proposals should be sent at once to my headquarters."

On May 4 the Germans surrendered to Montgomery all the German forces in Holland, northwest Germany and Denmark. Hostilities were to cease at 8 A. M. the next day, May 5. On May 4 Eisenhower reported as follows to the War Department:

Representative of Doenitz is proceeding to my headquarters tomorrow apparently to negotiate surrender of remaining enemy forces. I am sending a message to the Russian High Command at once informing them that I propose to instruct this representative to advise his Government to surrender to the Russian High Command all enemy forces facing the Russians and to surrender to those facing this front, including Norway. I am suggesting to the Russians that it is agreeable to them. I suggest further that the surrenders on both fronts be made simultaneously and at the earliest possible hour.

On May 6 Eisenhower described the situation in the following report:

General Jodi appeared at my headquarters tonight and in company with Admiral Friedeburg continued negotiations with my Chief of Staff and his assistants. It was obvious from the beginning of the discussion that the Germans are stalling for time, their purpose being to evacuate the largest possible number of German soldiers and civilians from the Russian front to within our lines. They continued the effort to surrender this front separately, even stating that no matter what my answer was, they were going to order all German forces remaining on the Western Front to cease firing and to refuse to fire against British or American troops. They asked for a meeting on Tuesday morning for signing final surrender terms with a forty-eight-hour interval thereafter in order to get the necessary instructions to all their outlying units. Their actual purpose was merely to gain time. I finally had to inform them that I would break off all negotiations and seat the Western Front preventing by force any further surrender.

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asking for authority to make a full and complete surrender but specifying that actual fighting would cease forty-eight hours after the time of signing. Since this solution obviously places the decision as to when fighting would cease in the hands of the Germans, I refused to accept it and stated that all fighting would have to cease on both fronts in forty-eight hours from midnight tonight or I would carry out my threat. I repeat that their purpose is to continue to make a front against the Russians as long as they possibly can in order to evacuate maximum numbers of Germans into our lines.

In any event, for all practical purposes fighting will cease almost immediately on this front for the reason that with minor exceptions my troops are on the line I have directed them to occupy.

If the arrangement goes through as above indicated, I suggest that a proclamation should be made on Tuesday by the Government's announcing Wednesday, May 9, as V-E Day, with a statement that fighting has already largely ceased throughout the front and that by the terms of the agreement hostilities will cease on one minute after midnight, night of May 8.

We hope to have a formal signing by tomorrow.

On May 7 Eisenhower reported that a brief instrument of unconditional military surrender had been signed at 2:40 that morning. He said that he was prepared to go to Berlin the next day for the final formal signing, at which Marshal Zhukov would be the Russian representative.

THE Russians had serious misgivings as to whether the Germans on their front would in fact surrender, and for that reason Moscow delayed the official announcement of the surrender by one day. We had previously agreed with Stalin that the announcement would be on Tuesday, May 8, at 9 A. M. Washington time. Churchill was now pressing for a day earlier, and the Russians were insisting on a day later. On the 7th Churchill sent messages by phone and cable urging that the formal announcement be made that day. I could see no way of accepting this change unless Stalin agreed. Stalin insisted, however, that the uncertain situation on the Russian front made this difficult. He still preferred May 9, and the final outcome of the several exchanges of messages was that the official announcement of the German unconditional surrender were made at the time originally agreed upon, Tuesday, May 8, at 9 A. M. Washington time.

The German surrender came only a little less than four weeks after I had taken the oath of office as President. On May 7, the night before V-E Day, we moved from Blair House to the White House.

I got up early V-E Day and wrote a letter to Mama and my sister Mary:

The White House, Washington.

Dear Mama & Mary:

I am fit this morning, and I slept in the President's room in the White House last night. They have finished the painting and have some of the furniture in place. I'm hoping it will all be ready for

you by Friday. My expensive gold pen doesn't work as well as it should.

This will be a historical day. At 9 o'clock this morning I must make a broadcast to the country announcing the German surrender. The papers were signed yesterday morning and hostilities will cease on all fronts at midnight tonight. Isn't that some birthday present?

Have had one heck of a time with the Prime Minister of Great Britain. He, Stalin and the U. S. President made an agreement to release the news all at once from the three capitals at an hour that would fit us all. We agreed on 9 A. M. Washington time, which is 3 P. M. London and 4 P. M. Moscow time. Mr. Churchill began calling me at daylight to know if we shouldn't make an immediate release without considering the Russians. He was refused and then he kept pushing me to talk to Stalin. He finally had to stick to the agreed plan, but he was mad as a wet hen. Things have moved at a terrific rate here since April 12. Never a day has gone by that some momentous decision didn't have to be made. So far luck has been with me. I hope it keeps up. It formally stays with me forever, however, and I hope when the mistake comes it won't be too great to remedy.

We are looking forward to a grand visit with you. I may not be able to come for you as planned but I'm sending the safest, finest plane and all kinds of help, so please don't disappoint me. Lots & lots of love to you both.

By 8:35 that morning of May 8 I was in the Executive Office of the White House. I was about to proclaim to the American people the end of the war in Europe. With me at that moment were Mrs. Truman, my daughter Margaret, high United States and British Army and Navy officials, and a number of leaders of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

First, I was to receive the press, but before the doors were opened, Senator McFarland, president pro tempore of the Senate, greeted me.

"Happy birthday, Mr. President," he said. I thanked him. The representatives of the press and radio hurried in—unusually silent.

I read them the official announcement. I then read them another statement in which I informed the Japanese what they could expect, and called their attention to the fact that we were now in a position to turn the greatest war machine in the history of the world loose in the Pacific.

At 9 o'clock, following the press conference, I broadcast an address to the nation, announcing the surrender of Germany, and calling upon the people to turn their efforts to the great tasks ahead—first to win the war in the Pacific, and then to win the peace.

I said: "I only wish that Franklin D. Roosevelt had lived to witness this day."

After that, I turned to the radio and said: "The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, joined by the Chinese, French, and other nations, have accepted the German unconditional surrender. The war in Europe is over. The people of the world may now turn their attention to the great tasks ahead—first to win the war in the Pacific, and then to win the peace."

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V-E DAY IN TIMES SQUARE: Partial view of the thousands who spontaneously poured into Times Square after surrender announcement in newspapers and on radio.